

# Legal Preparedness: Why One Health and the Fight Against AMR in the U.S. Takes More Than Science



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## One Health, AMR, and Why Governance Matters in the U.S.

One Health reflects a simple reality: the health of people, animals, and the environment is deeply interconnected. In the United States, however, turning that insight into action—particularly to address antimicrobial resistance (AMR)—requires more than scientific advances or technical guidance. It requires policies, laws, and regulatory frameworks that align with how U.S. systems actually function across federal, state, tribal, and local levels.

AMR illustrates this challenge clearly. Resistance develops and spreads across hospitals and clinics, farms and food production systems, and environmental pathways such as wastewater, soil, and runoff. These are not abstract systems; they are the everyday infrastructures that underpin public health, food security, and environmental protection. While the U.S. has strong scientific capacity, outcomes ultimately depend on whether governance frameworks enable coordinated, sustained action across these interconnected domains.

### What Is Legal Preparedness?

Legal preparedness refers to the intentional development and alignment of laws, regulations, and governance mechanisms so systems can prevent, detect, and respond to health threats effectively. It emphasizes readiness before emergencies occur, ensuring authorities are clear, coordination is possible, and tools are usable in practice.

The Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA) Legal Preparedness Action Package defines legal preparedness as "*the capability to map, develop, refine, and utilize legal instruments across sectors that enable the implementation of capacities to prevent, detect, and respond to infectious disease threats.*"

Policies without legal authority often stall. Laws without practical policy design often go unused. Legal preparedness bridges this gap, connecting policy goals to operational legal frameworks before crises emerge.

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## Legal Preparedness as the Backbone of One Health Action

Legal preparedness focuses on creating an enabling legal environment that supports prevention, coordination, and response over time. Rather than reacting during a crisis, it ensures that the legal foundations for action are already in place and adapted to real-world systems. In practice, legal preparedness helps to:

- Clarify roles and responsibilities across agencies and sectors
- Enable coordination and information-sharing
- Establish clear standards and operational processes
- Support sustainable resource mobilization
- Create accountability and enforcement mechanisms

For One Health, this means coherence across public health, animal health, veterinary medicine, agriculture, and environmental protection. Without alignment, even strong technical guidance can result in fragmented or inconsistent action. Legal preparedness is what allows One Health to function in practice, not just as a concept.

At the global level, this approach is increasingly being translated into practical tools that help governments assess whether their legal frameworks can support One Health action in practice.

### From Concept to Practice: A One Health Legislative Tool for AMR

To help countries assess whether their legal frameworks are fit for purpose across human, animal, and environmental health, the Quadripartite (World Health Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, World Organisation for Animal Health, and United Nations Environment Programme) recently developed the One Health Legislative Assessment Tool for Antimicrobial Resistance (OHLAT).

The OHLAT supports countries in systematically reviewing their legislation across sectors to identify gaps, overlaps, and opportunities for alignment. It translates One Health from principle into practice by helping governments understand whether existing legal frameworks enable coordination, accountability, and sustained AMR action across human, animal, and environmental health systems.

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## How Policies, Laws, and Regulations Work Together

Policies, laws, and regulations play distinct but complementary roles. Policies set priorities and goals, such as antimicrobial stewardship, surveillance, or environmental protection. Laws establish authority, define responsibilities, and create incentives or enforcement mechanisms. Regulations translate legislation into operational rules—standards, reporting requirements, permitting processes, and compliance obligations.

AMR demonstrates why alignment matters. Antibiotic use, resistance development, and environmental dissemination span multiple sectors governed by different authorities. One Health approaches are most effective when policies, laws, and regulations reinforce one another across sectors rather than operating in parallel silos.

## AMR as a Case Study: Why Context Matters

Effective AMR governance must reflect how U.S. systems actually operate. The U.S. has a mixed public-private health care system, highly diverse agricultural and food production models, and environmental pathways through which resistance spreads via water, soil, and waste.

Regulatory context is equally important. Environmental monitoring and discharge standards vary by state. Agricultural, industrial, and municipal waste are governed by different legal frameworks. Narrow or sector-specific approaches often fail in this environment. Policies that lack legal authority stall. Laws that ignore operational realities go unused. Sector-by-sector solutions overlook how resistance moves across systems.

***Effective AMR action therefore requires governance tools designed with system interactions (not silos) in mind.***

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## Federalism, Fragmentation, and the Role of Legal Preparedness

The U.S. brings significant strengths to One Health and AMR efforts, including robust research capacity and established surveillance and regulatory institutions. At the same time, authority is fragmented across federal, state, tribal, and local governments, with separate legal regimes for health care, animal health, agriculture, and environmental protection.

A legal preparedness approach helps navigate this complexity by aligning policies, laws, and regulations across sectors and levels of government; clarifying roles and responsibilities; and supporting prevention-focused, coordinated action rather than reactive responses. In a federal system, coherence does not happen automatically. It must be deliberately built.

### Why This Matters

**Science** tells us what needs to be done to address AMR.

**Legal preparedness** determines whether it can be done, and sustained, within real governance systems.

**Policy** tells us how to do it—with everyone on board.

### Advancing One Health and Legal Preparedness for AMR in the U.S.

The AMR Strategic Coalition works to strengthen the connection between AMR policy goals and legal and regulatory action. By bringing together expertise across human, animal, and environmental health and agriculture, ASC supports practical, governance-focused solutions that work within the U.S. system.

Its emphasis on coordination and trust reflects a core insight: durable progress on AMR depends on legal and policy frameworks that enable systems to work together.

Policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and advocates are encouraged to engage with the AMR Strategic Coalition and contribute to more coordinated, legally grounded One Health approaches to AMR in the U.S. approaches that match scientific ambition with governance reality.

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